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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001626

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: LRA UPDATE: 200 FARDC TROOPS IN ABA, ANOTHER 650  
EN ROUTE

REF: KINSHASA 1589 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (C) Both the FARDC and MONUC confirmed to PolCouns morning of September 30 that 200 FARDC troops are currently in Aba. (Note: These are non-integrated forces which General Padiri had ordered transferred from other patrol points in northeastern Oriental province, one company plus two platoons. They arrived in Aba the evening of September 28. End Note.) Congolese Air Force General John Numbi told PolCouns that 650 Congolese commandos (one battalion) are currently in Kisangani, and should arrive today in Aru. (Note: Aru, the closest town to Aba, is being used by both MONUC and the FARDC as the staging point for military operations. End Note.) Another 560 commandos, who are flying from the city of Mbuji Mayi in Eastern Kasai province, might reach Kisangani by Sunday if the FARDC can overcome a problem with lack of fuel at the Mbuji Mayi airport. In addition, 150 FARDC troops from the First Integrated Brigade (Ituri District) arrived yesterday in Aru from Bunia and a further 400 are scheduled to reach Aru today (via FARDC transport).

2. (C) An MI-25 helicopter mission with MONUC and FARDC experts was already in the air at first light September 30 to evaluate the airstrip at Aba to see if it could be made usable for fixed-wing aircraft. The helicopter will also perform a general reconnaissance of the border area with both Sudan and Uganda. (Comment: Availability of the Aba airstrip would represent a critical factor in planned operations and deployment. The FARDC could fly troops directly into Aba, and the strip would be available for logistics support. Any significant rehabilitation work, however, could require equipment and materials that simply are not available. Transit on what is left of the road from Aru to Aba is estimated to take at least 10 hours, excluding vehicles stuck in the mud or breakdowns, both likely occurrences. The FARDC has no trucks or other vehicles in the region; trucks for deployments would come from Aru-based private sector sources. End Comment.) If the airstrip cannot (as expected) be made usable, MONUC is prepared to transport Congolese troops from Aru to Aba by helicopter. In preparation for this operation, MONUC is airlifting 50,000 liters of fuel from Bunia to Aru. MONUC is planning to use three MI-17 helicopters (each with a maximum troop-carrying load of 30 troops), with air cover from two MI-25's, to transfer 650 FARDC troops in virtually continuous flights Saturday and Sunday, with the objective of having at least 650 FARDC troops in Aba by Sunday night (in addition to the 200 already there). Transferring the remaining 1,200 troops envisioned as ultimately destined for Aba would, of course, take well into next week, given the logistical constraints (fuel, limited carrying capacity of the helicopters) and bad weather (the rainy season has begun) which could intervene at any point to impose further delays.

3. (C) Comment: The arrival of the 200 9th Military District troops in Aba is welcome news. As noted, other FARDC forces are en route, although one should never overestimate FARDC logistics capabilities to execute deployments on schedule. The arrival of a FARDC battalion via MONUC transport helicopters with MONUC gunship support should begin to provide something of a critical mass representing significant military pressure on LRA elements in the area. The ongoing deployments and military activity should at minimum already be making it clear to the LRA, should there be any lingering illusions, that they enjoy no sympathy for their presence even in this remote corner of the DRC.  
MEECE